

An analysis of talent management practices of recently hired employees from the perspective of the psychological contract.

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Olivia Bischoff, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

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## ABSTRACT

This research took the form of an explanatory case study focused within a single organisation to evaluate talent management practices of recently hired employees from the perspective of the psychological contract. The theory underpinning this research is Resource-Based Theory (RBT) in the context of Talent Management. The research aims were: 1) to analyse how talent management practices have affected the psychological contract, 2) to analyse how employees have responded and intend to respond if there has been a breach in the contract and 3) to analyse how employees have responded or intend to respond where psychological contract expectations have been met.

The key concepts identified include *talent management* and the *psychological contract*. The literature therefore expanded on talent management highlighting the importance of recruiting, attracting and retaining talent, especially in a global context where experience and skills are a source of competitive advantage. Following this, the concept of the psychological contract was used as a lens through which to analyse the experience of individuals, specifically focusing on new employees joining the organisation, to assess their socialisation and onboarding experience. The literature further explored the importance of focusing on new employees, as this is deemed by the literature as a critical time of transition in the shaping of the psychological contract. In further reviewing the literature regarding early onboarding, further review of the literature identified important components, including (1) socialisation and onboarding, (2) performance management and probation, (3) employee development and (4) work conditions. From reviewing the literature four propositions were deduced as follows:

- Proposition 1: All integrative processes in early onboarding influence the initial psychological contract of the employee. Proposition 1 was further divided into three sub propositions as follows: *Sub Proposition 1a*) HR plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract; *Sub Proposition 1b*) Supervisor support plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract; and

*Sub Proposition 1c)* The work team plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract.

- Proposition 2 stated: Performance discussions influence the psychological contract.
- Proposition 3: Employee development opportunities are a source of motivation in the fulfilment of the psychological contract.
- Proposition 4: Employment conditions influence the fulfilment of the psychological contract.

The research followed a qualitative approach, using deductive analysis to analyse the data collected from semi-structured interviews. The findings and discussion show that the propositions confirmed the literature and were relevant to the case study at hand. Where there was varying degree of experience regarding the effect of the influence or impact on the psychological contract this was noted and expanded on accordingly. The study also recognised the additional context that presented itself within the findings, namely the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research concludes in acknowledging the delimitations and limitations of the study while making suggestions for areas of future studies. To conclude, this research shows that the transition of a new employee in their early stages within the organisation is an opportunity to support in positively influencing and maintaining the psychological contract to support employee satisfaction and motivation. If organisations can also appreciate that the psychological contract is dynamic and can change over time based on changing circumstances or needs, then this can be proactively monitored to support long-term retention of talent.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The theoretical framework, which underpins this research, is resource-based theory. To create competitive advantage, the resource-based approach was part of a shift that saw organisations, in broad terms, begin to focus their attention on resources rather than on pure economic output (Barney, Ketchen & Wright, 2011). From a research perspective, the post-positivist paradigm has supported this shift to find value in acknowledging the subjective experience of groups and individuals (Houghton, Hunter & Meskell, 2012).

With the shift to focus on internal resources came the change to focus on employees deemed as talent. Effective talent management has been shown to drive organisations towards greater realisation of their business strategy and goals, thereby achieving greater business success (Sparrow & Makram, 2015). An organisation that prioritises talent management has embedded it within their Human Resource (HR) philosophy which would inform HR strategy, policy, systems, and practice to create ‘strategic stability’ (Sparrow & Makram, 2015). This is because this focus creates the necessary setting for talented individuals to create value (Sparrow & Makram, 2015). With this backdrop, the increased pressure in the external labour landscape shows the repetitive pattern, that from a global perspective; the number of highly skilled individuals is less than the number of highly skilled jobs that need to be filled (Petkovic, 2007; App, Merk & Büttgen, 2012). This in turn, asks HR to urgently start finding ways to strategically and sustainably attract, recruit, motivate and retain talent (Farndale, Pai, Sparrow & Scullion, 2010). Organisations and employees need to negotiate their terms of exchange. In other words, both parties need to detail what to give and receive within the relationship (Farndale et al., 2010). For example, money and benefits for time and skill, the terms should be mutually beneficial for both parties (Farndale et al., 2010).

The research will take the form of a case study investigating the psychological contract of newly hired employees at an automotive company based in the Eastern Cape, from the employee perspective, and its impact on the psychological contract. The findings and discussion will be analysed through the lens of the psychological contract, within the context of talent management.

## 1.2. CONTEXT

For the South African automotive industry and the Eastern Cape Province itself, the automotive industry plays a critical part in the local economy, from job creation and investment into the community, making it a relevant industry for case study purposes. Using a case study approach, this research examines how early career experiences shape the psychological contract of new hires in a company within the automotive industry and intends to add to the growing body of knowledge of the psychological contract in talent management, with possible transferable insights to similar contexts. There is extensive research on the psychological contract, explicitly focusing on contract breaches and violations (Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). However, little literature focuses expressly on the early formation of the psychological contract with new hires and the individual factors that influence the perceptions of an employee's psychological contract after entry into the organisation. The phase of new hires entering an organisation is regarded as a crucial transition period (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2002.). The consolidation of this initial employee experience forms the basis of their psychological contract (De Vos & Freese, 2011). Following this context section, subsequent sections forming part of the literature review will introduce the key concepts for this research.

## 1.3 KEY CONCEPTS

For this research, two key concepts are defined:

- *Talent* is identified based on key strategic positions in the organisation, and specific competencies and skills that are required (Narayanan, Rajithakumar & Menon, 2019).
- *Psychological Contract* "...refers to an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party" (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123). In this context, this would refer to the individual employee and organisation.

#### 1.4. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study is utilised for this research and is positioned within the post-positivist paradigm. The post-positivist paradigm “acknowledges that it is not possible to achieve a state of total objectivity, but instead strive to be as objective or neutral as possible” (Houghton, et.al, 2012). This is because the researcher can appreciate the complexity of the human experience when uncovering or confirming meaning and understanding (Allmendinger, 2002). For data collection, semi-structured interviews will be conducted. Then, using deductive thematic analysis, the explanatory case study approach is selected as the appropriate method for this research (Pearse, 2019). This will allow causal links between the various concepts while describing phenomena from a qualitative perspective (Pearse, 2019).

#### 1.5. RESEARCH GOAL

From the psychological contract perspective, specifically focusing on its transactional content, this research aims to analyse how talent management practices have met expectations, or not, and the effect thereof.

The goals are summarised as follows:

- To analyse how talent management practices have affected the psychological contract.
- To analyse how employees have responded and intend to respond if there has been a breach in the contract.
- To analyse how employees have responded and intend to respond if psychological contract expectations have been met.

#### 1.6. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This thesis will contain several chapters as outlined below:

- Chapter 1 sets the introduction, context, key concepts, and methodology overview.
- Chapter 2 is the literature review. The relevant literature and theory detailing the key concepts, which underpin this research, will be examined.

- Chapter 3 will describe the research methodology and paradigm identified. The data collection process, interpretation of the data, and ethical considerations will also be laid out accordingly.
- Chapter 4 is where the findings are presented and discussed.
- Chapter 5 is the overall summary and conclusion of the study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

As stated earlier, 'Resource-Based Theory' (RBT) underpins this research. It started emerging in the 1980s and 1990s and was first referenced as the resource-based view (Acar & Polin, 2015). The concepts that underpin it have continued to evolve over the last two decades, evident by the number of academic articles published by various authors (Barney et al., 2011). This evolving academic content, in turn, builds and furthers the multiple views and perspectives either grounded in or linked to resource-based theory (Barney et al., 2011). The resource-based approach was part of a shift that saw organisations, in broad terms, begin to focus their attention on resources rather than on output (for example, the product or service offered) (Barney et al., 2011). RBT encourages organisations to focus inwards to gain or create a competitive advantage, explicitly managing their human capital (Barney et al., 2011). To create competitive advantage, resource-based theory establishes the framework for organisations to acknowledge, prioritize, efficiently and effectively manage internal resources, with the overall aim of successful long-term performance (Acar & Polin, 2015). This becomes important, especially when looking at the economic principle of scarcity, particularly scarcity of specific resources.

Human Resource Management (HRM) is critical to ensuring that the organisation remains sustainable through maintaining a healthy and balanced workforce (Ehnert & Harry, 2012). Effective talent management needs greater recognition by organisations as it is a vital lever for an organisation to effectively manage its competitive advantage (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). With this statement, it is suggested that talent management is integral to sustainable HRM from both a strategic and an operational perspective. In today's context, with a growing shortage and lack of highly skilled labour supply, this has become even more critical (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Due to the latter argument, organisations face a challenge in attracting, developing, and retaining talent effectively and are continuously reviewing and refreshing their approach to sustaining a competitive advantage (Festing & Schäfer, 2014; Narayanan, Rajithakumar & Menon, 2019). For HRM in practice, this includes an acknowledgment and appreciation of the psychological factors that shape the experiences of its employees (Chadwick & Dabu, 2008). Collectively, these individuals form the foundation of the social system of the organisation. In

other words, for this research, it is proposed that by understanding the subjective experience of the individual through the psychological contract construct, an organisation can gain insights into talent retention and thereby retain or build a competitive advantage. RBT therefore sets the theoretical frame in which to analyse talent management and the psychological contract. Further to this, if patterns emerge among individual employees, this can advance the employee retention strategy holistically for the organisation. The following sections of the literature review will look at the fundamental concepts mentioned in Chapter 1, supporting and informing this research. The key concepts include *Talent Management* and the *Psychological Contract*.

## 2.2. TALENT MANAGEMENT

Managing talent to ensure one has a sustainable workforce falls within HR's scope. The roles that present themselves within the HRM field, relevant for this research, can be categorised into two broad functions namely strategic partner and employee champion (Podgorodnichenko, Edgar & McAndrew, 2019). However, for this research, the HR lens from the strategic partner perspective has emphasis, as strategy needs to set direction in order to operationalise talent management. HR as a strategic partner is well positioned to evolve in integrating sustainable practice for long-term success and performance (Podgorodnichenko et.al, 2019). HR is associated with cost-reduction initiatives for profit gain (Macke & Genari, 2019). However, with the shift to the long-term, traditional HR practices can become sustainable for continuous business success (Macke & Genari, 2019). HRM is the overall key to ensuring that the organisation remains sustainable and responsible for long-term success, primarily through maintaining a healthy and balanced workforce (Ehnert & Harry, 2012).

Following the above paragraph, HR is able to act as the strategic partner to the business, to evolve and enable strategy by integrating it into sustainable business practice (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2019). In much of the literature, HRM is positioned as the strategic partner to build legitimacy and credibility (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2019). Examples of HR functions and processes to enable strategic goal attainment includes recruitment and selection, training and performance management (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2019). Secondly, HRM plays the part of employee advocate, ensuring that the work environment is conducive for everyday work (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2019). Any form of potential risk or threat which would cause harm to an employee would

be eliminated, or the chances of the event occurring reduced (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2019). An example of this would be to support young talent (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2019).

Within the academic literature to date, there is no unified understanding of talent management (Festing & Schäfer, 2014). This leaves the definition of talent and talent management practice to be decided within organisations themselves (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). It is generally agreed within the HRM community that talent management is of strategic significance for HRM. The loss of talent is associated with high costs due to recruitment, selection, and onboarding of new employees (Poisat, Mey, & Sharp, 2018). In addition to this, hiring an employee who is not a ‘best fit’ to the organisation can result in non-performance issues, which becomes a cost burden (Poisat et al., 2018). This highlights two broad categories of risk, namely capacity, and productivity (Dries, 2013). A differentiation has also been made in the literature between the public and private sectors when defining talent (Kravariti & Johnston, 2020). On a global front, there is a shortage of highly skilled talent, and with talent as a competitive advantage in today’s modern economy, it becomes critical for organisations’ to pay attention to their talent management strategy and practice (Wang, Li, Wang & Gao, 2017).

Along with other external factors such as changing demographics and value systems, this has created internal pressure in organisations to creatively and continuously find ways to attract, recruit, and retain employees deemed talent (Lester, Kickul & Bergmann, 2002; Dries, 2013). Furthermore, in a context of talent scarcity, there is also a shift of power from the traditional organisation having the resources and power, in the direction of the individual who now has a more substantial bargaining power based on their skills and experience (Dries, 2013). The Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) was first introduced in 2014 and is indicative of how increasingly important talent management effectiveness is becoming not only for organisations but also for the sustainability of cities and countries at large (Global Talent Competitiveness Index, 2020). Currently, South Africa ranks 70 out of 130 countries globally in terms of talent management effectiveness (Global Talent Competitiveness Index, 2020). “GTCI is an annual benchmarking report that measures and ranks countries based on their ability to grow, attract and retain talent” (Global Talent Competitiveness Index, 2020). This reinforces the point of human capital RBT. Without the sustainable contribution from employees and talent, organisations will not be able to

maximise productive output, specifically impacting the organisation's long-term financial success (Malik & Khalid, 2016, Dries, 2013).

RBT underpins this research, whereby human capital is seen as talent, which is the basis for a competitive advantage in today's current economic and social environment (Dries, 2013; Barney et al., 2011). Lepak and Snell (1999) highlight that human capital can be characterised as valuable and unique. In this context, the value would refer to the knowledge and skills the organisation's workforce would require now and, in the future, to add strategic importance to the core requirements of the business (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Dries, 2013). The uniqueness of human capital would refer to the difficulty in developing, sourcing, or replacing this talent (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Dries, 2013). Although there is no unified understanding of talent, various disciplines, mainly in psychology, have emphasised a specific characteristic of talent (Dries, 2013). Furthermore, industrial and organisational psychology see "talent as individual difference" contrasted with educational psychology, which sees "talent as giftedness" (Dries, 2013, p.275).

However, available in the literature, there are four main streams or perspectives, by which to understand talent management. The first stream uses the term "employee" interchangeably with the term "talent" so that talent management and human resource management are used as synonyms (Narayanan et al., 2019; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). The second stream, which is associated with succession planning within an organisation, looks at an organisation having a talent pipeline or talent pool, which can feed the organisation with crucial skills when required (Narayanan et al., 2019; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). The third stream regards all employees as the best-sourced candidates, regardless of position (Narayanan et al., 2019; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). This would be due to high quality and standards placed on the recruitment and selection processes (Narayanan et al., 2019; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Lastly, the fourth stream identifies talent as positions that add strategic value, with specific competencies and skills required for long-term organisational success (Narayanan et al., 2019; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). In the context of talent management, this becomes especially challenging when considering individual needs, expectations, preferences, and values in ensuring effective talent management strategies for a wide range of employees (Festing & Schäfer, 2014). The process of attracting and developing talent comes at a high cost to organisations, and this is where a retention strategy is critical (Narayanan

et al., 2018). Studies have shown that companies who invest and focus on their talent strategies are more likely to outperform other companies in the same industry (Narayanan et al., 2018). For this research, the second and fourth perspectives of talent management are adopted, focusing on positions that add strategic value and developing a talent pipeline for future positions.

Talent management practices to retain a steady supply of talented employees for key posts emphasise how competitive salaries and benefits, organisational culture, relationships with managers and peers, and working conditions influence an employee's decision to stay or leave an organisation (Kumar & Arora, 2012). Interestingly, motivation increases when employees know that they are regarded as talent to the organisation, compared to when they are unaware of this (Festing & Schaefer, 2013; Bjoerkman et al., 2013). Factors that can influence an employee to stay within an organisation include their preferences based on their lifestyle (Kumar & Arora, 2012). In addition to a competitive salary, which can be a strong element that supports retention, other benefits, which are of value to employees, include healthcare facilities and work-life balance benefits (Kumar & Arora, 2012). In addition, training and development to support career progression are particularly important, especially for younger employees (Kumar & Arora, 2012). Retention of talent is also more favourable in the long-term for organisations, as continuously needing to recruit and develop new employees is costly and provides less stability for the organisation's longevity (Kumar & Arora, 2012).

The traditional way of framing effective HRM would be "fair and consistent," but this appears to be transitioning towards an approach of "fair and personalised" (Poisat et al., 2018). Considering talent scarcity, this again points to the shift in power towards individual employees and their expectations. This shows that the context in which talent management is analysed seems to be continuously changing. There is currently limited research in talent management and its effects on the individual employee's attitudes and behaviours (Höglund, 2012). Due to this limited knowledge, additional research requires analysis of the varying experiences of the individual employee and how talent management practices can shape employees' attitudes within the organisation and the consequential behaviours (Höglund, 2012). The psychological contract is a valuable viewpoint to further investigate HRM and talent management practice from an employee perspective (Khoreva, Vaiman, & Van Zalk, 2017).

### 2.3. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

There is much literature shaping the understanding of the construct of the psychological contract. For example, during the 1960s, Argyris (1960), Schein (1962), and Levinson et al. (1965) were the first to conceptualise and discuss the idea of the psychological contract (Robinson, 1997; Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). However, Rousseau (1989, 1994, 2001) further advanced the concept and become became a critical author and contributor to the contemporary understanding of the psychological contract perspective. “The term psychological contract refers to an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party” (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123). In the context of the employment relationship, this would refer to the employee exchanging their skills, hard work, time, and loyalty with the other party, which is the organisation (Payne et al., 2015). The organisation, in exchange, offers money and security in the form of a salary with benefits and development opportunities (Payne et al., 2015). Thus, the psychological contract can be defined as the ‘invisible’ contract parallel to the ‘legal employment contract’ (Chien & Lien, 2013). Therefore, when new employees enter an organisation, a new ‘relationship’ is formed, characterised by implicit promises and reciprocal expectations that are tangible and intangible (Festing & Schaefer, 2013; Zhao et al., 2007).

The psychological contract can be classified into two broad types, namely relational or transactional, and are differentiated by characteristics such as scope, tangibility, and duration (Rousseau, 1990; Dixon-Fowler et al., 2019). From the employee's perspective, relational exchanges may be violated when the employer fails to meet certain expectations or promises (Krause & Moore, 2018). A relational exchange refers to a more “socio-emotional” currency and is linked to the expectations or needs to work in a specific type of organisation with a particular kind of leadership style or for the opportunity to progress in one’s career (Rousseau, 1990; Dixon-Fowler et al., 2019). Therefore, the focus is intrinsic, creating a more subjective understanding and experience within the employer-employee relationship (Rousseau, 1989). On the other hand, transactional exchange mainly refers to the monetary or other benefits exchanged and is usually more short-term or close-ended (Rousseau, 1990; Dixon-Fowler et al., 2019). Therefore, the focus is extrinsic, and the scope is narrow, which makes elements of this contract observable and evident (Rousseau, 1990).

From the employee perspective, if the employer meets promises made and obligations, this will motivate the employee to fulfil their end of the contract, resulting in a balanced and harmonious agreement and relationship; assuming that the employee is also fulfilling the expectations of the employer (Krause & Moore, 2018). On the other hand, with a transactional exchange, if there is a breach, the contract may not necessarily result in an employee leaving the organisation but can manifest as less commitment and greater general dissatisfaction in the workplace (Krause & Moore, 2018). However, this will depend on how the individual employee cognitively and emotionally processes the severity of the breach, based on various factors (Krause & Moore, 2018). For example, suppose the circumstances under which the breach occurs are beyond the employer's control. In that case, reasonable processing of the situation could result in the employee being more understanding and 'forgiving' (Krause & Moore, 2018). On the other hand, a consideration, which would conjure a negative response from the employee and harm the employment relationship, would be if the breach were intentional on the part of the organisation and somebody did little to communicate, rectify or at least explain the reasons for the breach (Lester et al., 2002). This perspective can be further explored through the resources conservation theory, which outlines how there can be shifts in the transactional and relational aspects of the psychological contract to increase or decrease "economic and emotional resources" (Wang, Li, Wang & Gao, 2017).

The psychological contract is based on the principle of reciprocity (Rousseau, 1989). When obligations, promises, and expectations are met, the psychological contract is either fulfilled or can even be over-fulfilled (Conway & Briner, 2002). When the psychological contract is met, this leads to higher engagement, commitment, and overall well-being of the employee (Agarwal, 2011). The consequence is that there is a reduced intention to leave the organisation (Agarwal, 2011). While an over-fulfilled contract produces a range of positive feelings for employees, it is not as significant in its impact compared to the negative emotions associated with a perceived breach or violation (Conway & Briner, 2002).

A breach involves the cognitive process of being aware that something is 'broken' or 'unfulfilled' in the psychological contract (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). A breach is broadly defined in two ways: firstly, there may be incongruence, where there are differing views or perspectives as to

what would have resulted in a fulfilled obligation, promise, or expectation by one or both of the parties (Jonsson & Thorgren, 2017; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Secondly, a breach can occur when an obligation or promise is reneged upon; this is where a conscious decision or action has been taken by one party not to fulfil the expectation, whether this is through choice or not (Jonsson & Thorgren, 2017; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Unfortunately, many authors do not make a clear distinction between the two constructs, breach, and violation (Zhao et al., 2007). “When a party in a relationship believes that the other has violated an agreement (implied or explicit), the "victim" experiences anger, resentment, a sense of injustice, and wrongful harm (Rousseau, 1989, pp.129-130). “This description implies that violation goes far beyond the mere cognition that a promise has been broken, and it is reasonable to assume that employees can perceive that their organisation has failed to fulfil an obligation without experiencing the strong affective response associated with the term violation” (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 230).

A psychological contract that is unfulfilled amounts to a breach or a violation of the psychological agreement (Payne et al., 2015). The consequences from an employee perspective can result in lowered job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and productivity; resulting in negative performance and work outcomes (Zhao et al., 2007). In addition, the employee might experience a range of feelings from emotional exhaustion, hurt to betrayal (Conway & Briner, 2002; Gakovic and Tetrick, 2003). On the other hand, when an employee’s psychological contract is fulfilled, this will result in increased commitment to the organisation, which in turn increases job satisfaction, results in high levels of productivity to support the organisation in achieving its strategic and operational goals (Poisat et al., 2018). However, the research shows that the opposite of this is also true (Poisat et al., 2018).

Although Guest (1998) sees the importance of the psychological contract theory being advanced, he is critical of its foundation. One essential criticism is around the definition that Rousseau (1989, 1990) has developed. The criticism is that the psychological contract has become ‘populist’ and narrowly focuses on the employee perspective disregarding other views for research (Guest, 1998). Further to this, the critical view of the psychological contract concept highlights an inherent imbalance of power between an organisation and an individual employee when negotiating the initial terms of the contract and terms of exchange (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). This initial

imbalance of power continues to be sustained through the organisation's systems, structures, and culture are always likely to result in suppressed breaches or violations from the employee perspective (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). The same argument can support Rousseau's view (1989, 1990) as to why analysing the psychological contract from the employee perspective becomes essential. If there is inherently an imbalance of power, more research should be on the employee perspective, which is often suppressed, to understand the individual experience. In addition to focussing on the employee perspective of the psychological contract, with the growing need for highly skilled labour in the global and local markets, focusing on talent and their needs, wants, and expectations has become critical. The implication here is that organisations need to change or enhance their attraction and retention strategies (De Vos & Meganck, 2008). What is also important to note here is that, while the organisation is referred to as a single entity, in reality many role players represent the organisation, directly or indirectly shaping the individual employee's psychological contract (Clarke & Scurry, 2020). Therefore, congruence becomes a vital principle to embed human resource strategy and operations, and thereby to minimise psychological contract breaches and violations (Clarke & Scurry, 2020).

Hence, from the above literature, one can deduce if talent management practices meet employees' expectations, there is a greater likelihood that there will be the fulfilment of the psychological contract leading to healthy levels of commitment and satisfaction. On the other hand, the opposite is also true; if talent management practices do not meet the expectations of employees, there is a greater likelihood that there will be a breach of the psychological contract leading to psychological withdrawal, and in turn, resulting in lower levels of commitment and general dissatisfaction.

The terms obligation, promise, and expectation seem to be often used side by side in the literature. It is therefore essential to note some differences and to acknowledge their respective application and impact. For example, the word obligation carries a more substantial responsibility on the party owing. In this instance, as embedded in the meaning, the organisation is the idea of duty, which can be legal or moral (Merriam-Webster, 2020). On the other hand, a promise or expectation can have a legal or ethical aspect, depending on how it arrived (Merriam-Webster, 2020). The former provides some insight into why a breach in obligation might lead to a violation when an individual experiences a stronger negative feeling where fundamentally, trust has been undermined (as

opposed to a breach in promise or expectation) (Rousseau, 1989, 1990). What is important to note here is that the psychological contract should not be seen as fixed but instead described as a “dynamic process that unfolds gradually from the pre-employment stage onwards and throughout the different stages of employment” (De Vos, De Stobbeleir & Meganck, 2009, p. 289).

#### 2.4. SOCIALISATION AND ONBOARDING

During the socialisation stage, an employee begins working for and learning about the organisation (Thomas & Anderson, 1998). As the employees make sense of the environment, gain new knowledge about their environment, their understanding and performance starts to excel (Thomas & Anderson, 1998). As new employees mature their sense-making process, they can adjust their psychological contract to fit reality (De Vos, Buyens & Schalk, 2003; Rousseau, 2001; Thomas & Anderson, 1998). Furthermore, this highlights a fundamental distinction in the literature. Although referred to as ‘dynamic’ and flexible, especially in the initial phase of employment, the psychological contract can evolve to be more stable. Rousseau (1998, p.669), outlines “...we observe that relatively durable mental models characterise the psychological contract, suggesting that psychological contracts can be resilient in the face of organisational change and external shocks, rather than being easily violated or changed”. This brings forward the idea that there can be negotiation and re-negotiation of the psychological contract, shifting more frequently in the socialisation process and knowledge acquisition (Thomas & Anderson, 1998).

“Traditionally, research has tended to characterize newcomers as recipients of socialization rather than participants in the process...” (Bauer & Green, 1994, p. 211). Based on this, one can assume them to be active players in the employment relationship, validating the importance of obtaining their perspective. Research suggests that early experiences of socialisation influence the long-term employee view of the organisation (Bauer & Green, 1994); once again, showing the importance for organisations to focus on the early formation of the psychological contract during the onboarding phase, which would be a key focus area for managing talent.

A distinction between socialisation and onboarding can be made (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015). The socialisation process is a highly personal and reflective process experienced by the new employee (Klein et.al, 2015). In contrast, onboarding is what the organisation deliberately designs

and coordinates to support newcomers in adjusting to their new work environment to support integration from a social and performance perspective (Klein et al., 2015; Becker & Bish, 2019). Before a newcomer's first day, from a timing perspective, one can see their integration in three phases, namely, pre-entry (with expectations before starting), entry (first initial arrival into the organisation), and integration (company processes aimed to integrate the employee) (Korte, Brunhaver & Sheppard, 2015). Onboarding is the deliberate informal and formal initiatives that the organisation facilitates to acclimatise and support employee adjustment into the workplace and their role (Becker & Bish, 2019). The outcomes of this can be categorised as distal (e.g., performance, job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation) or proximal (e.g., role and task clarity, team social fit, networks) (Becker & Bish, 2019). The assumption is that when entering their new work context, a new employee seeks as much information as possible to transition and integrate smoothly while also reducing any feelings of uncertainty (DeBode & Mossholder, 2017).

A broad lens to view onboarding supporting the socialisation process of a new employee includes viewing from a macro, functional and micro perspective (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). The macro view is where the employee learns about and receives information about the organisation and is usually facilitated by formal company sessions organised by HR; this includes information such as policies, rules, organisational strategy, values, and goals (Cesário & Chambel, 2019; Caldwell & Peters, 2017). The functional view contextualises how the employee learns more about their role in the context of the team in which they are situated; their immediate supervisor or manager usually facilitates this; and depending on the organisation, a mentor or coach might be appointed (Cesário & Chambel, 2019; Caldwell & Peters, 2017). Finally, the micro view frames the daily interactions and knowledge sharing or support conversations between the employee and their team (Cesário & Chambel, 2019).

Bauer (2010) offers a complimentary perspective, where onboarding to support socialisation is classified into four categories including:

- Compliance (i.e. sharing of crucial information on policies, rules, how things are done).
- Clarification (i.e. work tasks, goals, and expectations are clear).
- Culture (i.e. through informal and formal practices giving employees a sense of organisational norms or how things are done) and

- Connection (i.e. providing opportunities for employees to develop their networks and build good relationships with members in the organisation, including their team).

Socialisation through onboarding should therefore be seen holistically and various agents involved in this integration support include HR, line manager, and employee's new work team and colleagues. An alternative way to view onboarding is through the structure "Inform, Welcome and Guide" (Klein et al., 2015, p. 263). The informing phase is to ensure the employee has all the necessary information, equipment, and resources to integrate effectively and is characterised by:

- Communication as one-way and two-way communication opportunities with new employee
- Resources "...captures practices beyond direct communications that make resources available to new employees to facilitate their adjustment" (Klein et al., 2015, p. 265).
- Training as planned sessions to support in facilitating learning or acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge.

The welcome phase is around expressing value and acknowledgment for the new team member joining the team and ensuring a smooth social integration (Klein et al., 2015). Finally, the guide phase will ensure that the employee receives direct and ongoing support to effectively integrate and perform (Klein et al., 2015). The specifics around onboarding practices also will largely depend on the organisation itself (Chillakuri, 2020). Job Satisfaction refers to how fulfilled or pleased the employee feels in their role. An employee who can be productive leads to satisfaction in one's role due to the corresponding relationship between productivity and satisfaction. Therefore, the onboarding process supports facilitating the psychological contract, which plays a pivotal role in determining the employee's overall satisfaction and fulfillment (DeBode & Mossholder, 2017). (Deepa, Palaniswamy & Kuppasamy, 2014); (Zhao et.al, 2007; (Halkos & Bousinakis, 2010); Locke, 1976).

From the literature, the following propositions are deduced:

- Proposition 1: All integrative processes contained in early onboarding influences the initial psychological contract of the employee.
  - Sub Proposition 1a) HR plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract.

- Sub Proposition 1b) Supervisor support plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract.
- Sub Proposition 1c) The work team plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract.

## 2.5. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND PROBATION

Performance management creates a holistic structure to evaluate the psychological contract and employment relationship (Stiles, Gratton, Bailey, Hope-Hailey & McGovern, 2007). This is specifically beneficial within the initial stages of employment following, or parallel to the socialisation and onboarding processes, when objectives and tasks are being set and evaluated as part of early integration for the employee. Over time, due to various external changes (e.g., the changing HRM landscape, market circumstances, and technology's impact on culture), performance management has undergone various theoretical shifts with practical implications (Stiles et al., 2007). A high-level summary of these shifts includes moving from a more structured or strict approach to a flexible approach, to finding ways to support and develop the employee to perform more efficiently and effectively (Stiles et al., 2007). This shift further suggests that performance feedback and discussions have become more frequent than past practice, creating space for two-way feedback where required, from the employee's perspective (Stiles et al., 2007). Constructive feedback ensures that the employee receives feedback on their performance in a manner appropriate and supportive. In other words, whether positive or negative, constructive feedback is to ensure that employees receive suggestions, support, direction, or encouragement on how they are progressing in their role (Sommer & Kulkarni, 2012).

Another evolution to highlight is that job stability might have been more guaranteed in the past but has moved to be more conditional (Stiles et al., 2007). For example, good and consistent performance equates to job stability and long-term prospects. Performance management can be defined as an opportunity for the employer (supervisor) to set clear goals and tasks with their employee, ensuring that these goals and tasks are strategically linked to the overarching company or divisional objectives (Stiles et al., 2007). Over time, performance discussions create space to reflect and evaluate how the employee performs these tasks to achieve the agreed goals (Stiles et

al., 2007). An employee requires support in development or training offered to support in-role performance (Stiles et al., 2007). An extended part of performance management regarding the outcome of the process or discussions would be to see how performance appraisals lead to performance-linked rewards such as monetary compensation for good performance (Stiles et al., 2007).

A distinction can be made between in-role and extra-role behaviour for performance. In-role performance refers to the performance expected or stipulated as part of the employment contract and is linked to tasks and goals created for performance management (Restubog, Bordia & Tang, 2006). This can be compared to extra-role behaviours "...which transcend core job requirements and are voluntary in nature..." (Restubog et al., 2006, p.300). An example of this would be supporting or coaching a fellow employee with some of their tasks, but it is not part of the core expected outcome from the employee's agreed-to operational tasks (Restubog et al., 2006).

When a new employee is hired, South African legislation caters for a probation period, allowing the employer within a reasonable period to assess an employee's practical ability to meet job demands and requirements (Baloyi & Crafford, 2006). Although new hires are aware, sometimes the impression exists that the probation period is merely a development opportunity that can cause misunderstandings or misguided expectations if not explicitly administered or discussed (Baloyi & Crafford, 2006). Some organisations ensure that they have policy documents that govern probation (Baloyi & Crafford, 2006). To ensure that new employees are empowered to succeed in their initial integration into the organisation will largely depend on how well the organisation inducts them and how well their manager can facilitate their learning and performance management, within the team and in a holistic and relevant fashion (Baloyi & Crafford, 2006). This is where the onboarding and socialisation process can support a beneficial integration process for a new employee. Following successful probation, this monitoring of performance should continue along with the organisation's performance management systems, to ensure that the relevant guidance, counseling, and training are provided for employees, to enable them to continue being successful in their role (Baloyi & Crafford, 2006).

From the literature, the following proposition is deduced:

- Proposition 2: Performance discussions influence the psychological contract.

## 2.6. EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

"New employee development (NED) is defined as all development processes used to advance new employees to desired levels of performance. It encompasses all development activities in which an organization engages, whether they are formal or informal and whether they are planned or unplanned" (Holton, 1996, p. 233). Employee development offerings include and are not limited to coaching, performance feedback, career planning, training, and creating empowerment and participation through flexibility or freedom of work to make decisions within their role or function (Hameed & Waheed, 2011).

There is a direct link between employee development, performance, and overall company effectiveness and competitive advantage (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). Organisations can increase productivity by supporting employees through various initiatives and offerings to optimise their technical capability, or increase their technical ability to perform, while simultaneously motivating employees. Employee development is beneficial for the organisation, but can also be a source of motivation for an employee, as it increases their employability, and enhance their prospects for promotion or future advancement (Hoon Lee & Bruvold, 2003). Worthy to note is that the completion of formal training by an individual, will over time, create higher pay opportunities, leading to higher marketability and more employment opportunities in the labour market (Bishop, 1989).

Sparrow (1998) has suggested that HRD managers define and maintain employees' psychological contracts. With training and development serving as a potential source of motivation, this can influence the outlook and behaviour of employees either positively or negatively, depending on the nature, content, and experience of the training (Bartlett, 2001). It can be deemed positive if it meets or exceeds the expectations and needs of the employee and supports them in their daily tasks or overall career development (Bartlett, 2001). Alternatively, it can be deemed negative if the programme is irrelevant or disconnected from the individual employee's needs (Bartlett, 2001).

Training can be informal (e.g., peer to peer or immediate supervisor) or formal (e.g., classroom/programme based). Informal training by peers is seen to be more beneficial and effective when this is conducted by supervisors (Bishop, 1989). Training initiatives can increase productivity for employees in their first year, even if this takes the form of informal, rather than formal training (Bishop, 1989). In the early stages of employment, informal training would likely take up a substantially larger portion of training and development an employee participates in; however, this would be dependent on the nature of work or function (Bishop, 1989). Therefore, training and development opportunities become a source of employee motivation and a key area of focus for HR and talent management activities (Bartlett, 2001).

In summary, training can be viewed as a management practice that can be controlled or managed to elicit a desired set of unwritten, reciprocal attitudes and behaviours, including job involvement, motivation, and organizational commitment” (Bartlett, 2001, p. 338). An extended view to this lends itself to acknowledge that new employees require on- and off-the-job training to support their integration and ability to function within the new working environment effectively and efficiently (Obisi, 2011).

From the literature, the following proposition is deduced:

- Proposition 3: Employee development opportunities are a source of motivation in the fulfillment of the psychological contract.

## 2.7. WORK CONDITIONS, COMPENSATION, AND BENEFITS

Employee development as a source of motivation is important to evaluate in the context of work conditions, compensation, and benefits as they both can complement one another to connect an employee to his or her work environment. Compensation and benefits are usually referenced as one of the top reasons that cause an employee to leave an organisation (Bryant & Allen, 2013). This could be due to the actual or perceived fairness of pay across various levels of the organisation and how the compensation and benefits package is structured, and the HR processes around this (Bryant & Allen, 2013). In addition, fringe benefits supplementing an employee’s competitive salary forming part of their total compensation package is important for an employer to assess

(Leibowitz, 1983). Examples include annual vacation leave, the number of days paid for sick leave, and family responsibility leave provided by the company (Leibowitz, 1983). In addition, assessing how the company structures payment or benefit for additional time worked, medical or health insurance benefits, and recognition attributed to long-serving employees is necessary for evaluating overall employee satisfaction (Leibowitz, 1983). Although compensation is a critical factor, it provides insufficient evidence to understand reasons for turnover (Bryant & Allen, 2013). On the surface, an individual could choose to leave for a higher-paying job in another organisation, but more reasons can become apparent (Bryant & Allen, 2013). This is because the employee experience is characterised by other factors, such as the style of their immediate manager, team culture, co-worker relationships, and general job satisfaction (Bryant & Allen, 2013).

Some statistics suggest that employees have assessed their experience within the organisation within the first six months of employment and form their intention to stay or leave (Tarquinio, 2006). "...employees will perceive an organisation that treats its employees fairly and with consideration (e.g., good working conditions, merit pay, training, and career development opportunities) as an organisation that has met its contractual obligations to them under the psychological contract" (Winter & Jackson, 2006, p. 424; Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro, 1990).

From the literature, the following proposition is deduced:

- Proposition 4: Employment conditions influence the fulfillment of the psychological contract.

## 2.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY

According to a Deloitte report on talent, 85% of employees who have been with their organisation five years or more have the intention to stay within their organisation; contrasted to the "turnover red zone," which refers to newer employees, specifically employees who have been in employment for two years or less (Deloitte, 2020). What was also noted is that the factors that retain employees are not necessarily what prompts them to eventually leave (Deloitte, 2020). This indicates that employees' experiences in the first few months are a critical phase for the organisation regarding onboarding and its impact on the psychological contract and turnover intention.

The implication here is for organisations to be aware of how influential the initial phase of employment is, including the formal and informal process of onboarding in shaping the realistic setting and understanding for new employees to develop their psychological contract (Robinson et al., 1994; Thomas & Anderson, 1998). If this were the case, it would lead to lower breaches and violations over time, advancing organisational success in the long-term to support employee engagement and retention. In addition, HRM and talent management directly influence employees through policies, practices, and processes, explicitly illustrating what the organisation deems as necessary overall and what is valued. With this noted, the overall holistic experience of the new employee becomes essential to assess, especially as to talent management practices the new employee would experience in their first months within the organisation.

In support of creating a competitive advantage based on people, talent management practices are designed towards the various stages of the employee life cycle, with examples being training and development, reward, recognition and benefits, performance and progression, and retention and eventually exiting (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Hanif & Yunfei, 2013). Due to a limited research timeframe, formal and informal integrative onboarding and socialisation processes to support new employee adjustment to the workplace, employee development, performance monitoring (probation), and general employment conditions will focus on exploring the employee perspective are the focus areas drawn from the literature.

Together with this, employees can extract meaning from their experiences and engagement with HR activities (Höglund, 2012). With fulfilment of the psychological contract, this positive experience results in increased commitment and overall well-being for the employee, which reduces the intention to leave the organisation (Poisat et al., 2018). This is because when an employee is new, the possibility exists from early on, to engage in discussions that are more explicit and able to influence expectations of the work context (Poisat et al., 2018). This could lead to supporting the development and fulfilment of the psychological contract, thus decreasing the likelihood of a breach or violation and, in turn, increasing the intention to leave the organisation (Poisat et al., 2018). Turnover intention can broadly be defined as the conscious awareness of an employee who voluntarily plans to leave the organisation (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Research

suggests a stronger relationship exists between the psychological contract breach and intention to quit, than a breach or violation of the psychological contract leading to the neglect of job expected responsibilities (Turnley & Feldman, 2000). However, although primary duties would not be neglected, additional responsibilities and extra-role behaviour supporting organisational effectiveness would decrease (Turnley & Feldman, 2000).

Little literature explicitly focuses on the early formation of the psychological contract with new hires and the individual factors that influence the perceptions of an employee's psychological contract after entry into the organisation. The phase of new hires entering an organisation is regarded as an important transition period (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2002.). Furthermore, new hires have varying experiences when joining a new organisation or job role, characterised by uncertainty and change (De Vos & Freese, 2011). The consolidation of this initial employee experience forms the basis of their psychological contract (De Vos & Freese, 2011). From the psychological contract perspective, specifically focusing on its transactional content, this research aims to analyse how talent management practices have met expectations or not and the effect thereof.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DESIGN**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will highlight the methodology's different components, including the paradigm framing this research, method, data collection technique including participants, data analysis, reliability and validity, and ethical considerations.

### **3.2 POST-POSITIVIST RESEARCH PARADIGM**

A paradigm can be defined as a professional or scientific frame of reference underpinned by a set of beliefs, assumptions, and standards (Clark, 1998). The post-positivist paradigm evolved from the limitations of the positivist paradigm (Clark, 1998). The positivist paradigm posits an objective truth that can be observed and analysed independently of the researcher (Allmendinger, 2002). The post-positivist paradigm acknowledges that absolute truth and certainty is not entirely possible; however, with clear concepts to ensure validity and reliability through controlled conditions (or theoretical propositions), the researcher can move as close to the truth as possible (Clarke, 1998; Houghton et al., 2002). The post-positivist paradigm has been used most commonly in the social science realm. It allows the researcher to explore or test meaning rather than merely analysing narrow cause and effect relationships with detachment and conviction (Allmendinger, 2002). In other words, the post-positivist paradigm appreciates diversity in meaning and outcome (Allmendinger, 2002). This makes this research paradigm appropriate for observation and analysis of practical and in-context social situations or phenomena (Allmendinger, 2002).

### **3.3. RESEARCH METHOD – CASE STUDY**

A case study method has been selected for this research to analyse in-depth, the circumstance and experiences of newly integrated individual employees from multiple facets (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A case study approach allows the researcher to look at the 'how and the why' phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This makes the case study method appropriate for social science research (Zainal, 2007). A case study is also a tool that allows complex issues to be discussed in simple terms while ensuring meaning is maintained from a whole and integrated perspective (Kohlbacher, 2006). It is

important to acknowledge that there are different case studies, such as explanatory, descriptive, exploratory, multiple case studies, and intrinsic (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This research uses an explanatory case study approach, which tests cause and effect linkages supported by theoretical propositions drawn from and therefore supported by academic literature (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The case study investigated the psychological contract of newly hired employees (i.e., 12-18 months in employment) at an automotive company based in the Eastern Cape. The employees represent a sample of office-based employees working in service areas that support the manufacturing and production areas.

### 3.4. DATA COLLECTION

The study focuses on the experience of newly hired employees. A new hire is defined as an individual who has been in the organisation's employment for between twelve to eighteen months. Within the HR environment, services are divided into manufacturing divisions and service support areas. To narrow the scope, the sample will be derived from office-based employees situated in service divisions. This is to facilitate the comparability of their expressed experience. The approach to qualitative sampling will use Robinson's approach (2014) of defining a sample universe, deciding on the sample size, devising a sample strategy, and sourcing the sample.

- *Define a sample universe:* The inclusion criteria are the type of division and permanent employees still within their first twelve months to eighteen months of employment within the organisation on probation, or who have recently finalised their probation period.
- *Decide on the sample size:* The target is between 8-10 employees. This sample size is pragmatic, influenced to support the timeframe allocated to collect and analyse the data. In addition, the sample size supports an in-depth case study approach. Finally, for a qualitative study, the sample size is deemed acceptable (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- *Devise a sample strategy:* Purposive sampling was used for selecting interviewees. The inclusion criteria define the basis upon which the sample was selected and this is purposive in nature, so that the target group will be able to respond appropriately to the questions of the study (Robinson, 2014).
- *Source the sample:* Relevant employees will be approached to participate in the research and participation consent to be obtained.

For data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Appendix D). The questions were formulated to explore the propositions deduced from the literature, with probing follow up questions asked where necessary. The length of the interview was 45 to 60 minutes. A structured interview uses pre-prepared questions, which are asked systematically to each interviewee (Qu & Dumay, 2011). In contrast, to acknowledge the complexity of social interaction and human behaviour, the semi-structured interview format that was used allows the interviewer to prepare specific questions but allows the flexibility required to access certain information that otherwise may not be available through a strictly structured interview (Qu & Dumay, 2011). For this research, eight interviewees consented and participated in the interview process.

### 3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

Using deductive thematic analysis, the explanatory case study approach was selected as the appropriate method for this research (Pearse, 2019). This will allow causal links between the various concepts while describing the phenomenon from a qualitative perspective (Pearse, 2019). Thematic analysis is utilised to systematically identify, categorise and code the data to extract overarching themes and patterns displayed in the set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Deductive thematic analysis ensures that the researcher formulates propositions drawn from literature and, from this too creates a set of codes with which to 'test' the propositions (Pearse, 2019). This codebook (Appendix E) supports the researcher in developing the question matrix (Appendix D) and is established before the data collection phase (Pearse, 2019). The interviews were recorded, and transcripts were created to ensure coding effectively takes place. Noteworthy observations from the engagements and interactions were recorded as additional field notes. The reviewing of the themes took place through pattern matching, and with this, the final reporting and write took place on the overall findings (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Pearse, 2019).

### 3.6. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

There is a lack of consensus in qualitative research regarding defining reliability and validity (Golafshani, 2003). Despite this lack of consensus, there have been parameters specified for reliability and validity in the context of qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability refers to how stable and consistently a researcher can measure and analyse data or reduce or eliminate any bias (Golafshani, 2003). For qualitative research, the focus for reliability extends to ensuring

the methods adopted to fit the research context to ensure consistency. An example of this is interview bias which can be influenced by unavoidable factors such as age, language, social status, and gender (Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 2010). In this research, the same interview questions were asked, formulated from propositions supported by current literature. In addition, the researcher was aware and acknowledged her individual experiences and perspectives when researching to reduce bias and increase objectivity (Noble & Smith, 2015).

On the other hand, validity refers to how accurately the research reflects the data set and findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Further to this, validity in qualitative research acknowledges that diverse or various experiences and realities exist, which broadens the definition of validity compared with that of quantitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015).

### 3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics can be understood by dividing it into two main categories, procedural and 'in-practice (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Procedural ethics refers to gaining approval or consent through recognised approval bodies or individuals relevant to the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). In this instance, the study was cleared by the University's ethics committee (Appendix F). Further to this, the company where this research is being conducted has granted permission with the individual participants also providing their consent to participate. These relevant documents can be found attached as appendices. The obtaining of consent and permission has been standardised by using documentation in the form of letters, research protocols, and informed consent forms (Appendices A, B and C).

Ethics in practice refers to ethical issues or concerns that could arise while conducting the research (for example, hearing sensitive information or information being shared about an individual or company process) and how the researcher can deal with this accordingly. Participants were not forced to share information they did not feel comfortable sharing. It would be unethical for the research to cause any harm to the participants. This is where the principles of autonomy (e.g., the right to participate or withdraw from study a voluntary process), beneficence (i.e., keeping the best interest of the participant in mind), and justice (i.e., not to cause harm) were important to keep in mind (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001).

### 3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has noted the qualitative nature of the research and that a case study approach was adopted. The data was analysed using deductive thematic analysis. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Reliability and validity informed the design of the study and analysis of the findings. All necessary consent and permissions were obtained to align to ethical principles and considerations.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presents the findings and discussion in line with the aims and objectives of the study. The propositions that have been deduced from the literature are as follows. Note that Proposition 1 has been further sub-divided into three sub-propositions:

- Proposition 1: All integrative processes contained in early onboarding influences the initial psychological contract of the employee.
  - *Sub Proposition 1a)* HR plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract.
  - *Sub Proposition 1b)* Supervisor support plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract.
  - *Sub Proposition 1c)* The work team plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract.
- Proposition 2: Performance discussions influence the psychological contract.
- Proposition 3: Employee development opportunities are a source of motivation in the fulfilment of the psychological contract.
- Proposition 4: Employment conditions influence the fulfilment of the psychological contract.

As this is an explanatory case study, deductive thematic analysis was used. First, the propositions listed above were deduced from the literature. Next, a coding manual was designed and included appropriate labels to identify key ideas from the propositions (Appendix E). These label-contained codes were then applied to the semi-structured interview data sets that were collected. This chapter has been compiled after cross-matching the coding manual to the data set to ‘test’ the propositions. Each section dealing with the individual proposition will follow the same structure, namely a summary of the main points from the literature, the findings with any additional themes that might have presented themselves and concluding with a brief discussion.

## 4.2 EARLY INTEGRATIVE PROCESSES FOR ONBOARDING

### 4.2.1 Early Onboarding

*Proposition 1: All integrative processes contained in early onboarding influences the initial psychological contract of the employee.*

The literature suggests that the onboarding activities that HR organises and conducts are usually formal, covering high-level information such as organisational history, general company overview, strategy, and values (Cesário & Chambel, 2019; Caldwell & Peters, 2017). In addition, although important to note is not the sole responsibility of HR, compliance and culture topics are also introduced by HR in the initial onboarding of a new employee. They include highlighting rules and procedures around various policies and practices (Bauer, 2010).

The literature also puts forward that the immediate supervisor or manager of an employee facilitates activities within the functional view; or if not directly the supervisor, a coach or mentor is appointed to support these activities (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). The categories by Bauer (2010) also highlight this with compliance (relevant for that area); clarification (expected work and job standards, expectations, and outcomes); culture (departmental norms and practices), and connection (directing new employees to the networks and colleagues relevant for them in the department or organisation). The micro perspective is the framework that notes the team interactions, discussions, and knowledge sharing that may happen daily, whether planned or unplanned (Cesário & Chambel, 2019).

- *4.2.1.1. Role of HR*

*Sub Proposition 1a) stated: HR plays a key role in early onboarding influencing the initial psychological contract.*

The findings suggest that HR plays a key, yet limited role in the early onboarding process. The onboarding sessions by HR were conducted either with a group of new employees or as individual sessions and were either was face-to-face or virtual. These modes of delivery show a varied experience of the employee sessions. Respondents indicated that HR did share, in addition to this high-level overview, with new employees, some practical

information around day-to-day topics such as helpful contact lists and instructions on accessing specific portals or systems used by all employees in the company. One employee described this practical information as ‘powerful.’ Based on the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the induction about COVID-19 was noted as extremely helpful.

In addition to the information presented in these sessions, respondents' experience in and around the coordination of these sessions was noted. For example, one respondent indicated dissatisfaction related to their first-day arrangements. The employee arrived early in the morning, expecting to be met by the HR contact, only to be kept waiting for several hours, with no explanation for the need to have arrived early in the morning. Another respondent also indicated that their first-day experience was overwhelming, and they got lost trying to find the correct entrance. Still, it was all resolved quickly, and it ‘wasn’t a big deal as they were able to speak to HR to clarify the meeting point.

The HR onboarding experience was positive from a content and process perspective. This led to the fulfillment of the psychological perspective as the employee felt empowered with information and was clear on expectations from a company perspective. Interestingly, although HR was generally present in the early onboarding process and played a role in providing key information, the format or mode of delivery in how these onboarding activities took place, seemed to be of minor influence on the psychological contract. This is illustrated by a comment, where the employee referenced their session as ‘I have forgotten it...but I think in all honesty it is a video clip that can be sent afterward’ (instead of a presentation by the HR representative), thereby denoting some indifference to the format of how the information was shared. In contrast, where the HR onboarding experience was unfavorable, this led to a negative influence on the psychological contract where the employee felt uncared for by the organisation and was not clear on what was expected of them.

An additional theme regarding HR onboarding that presented itself in the findings is that respondents had a broadened view of HR onboarding. To illustrate, some respondents also referred to their interaction - or rather, lack of interaction - with HR regarding their queries around relocation or medical aid before their first day or during the early days from when they started in the organisation. This information was necessary for their general

onboarding experience. Where there were slow responses from HR, this created a negative association with the organisation. In other cases, before joining, respondents who knew someone in the organisation chose to approach their network in the organization to gain answers or access to HR-related information, rather than approaching the HR staff.

Overall, from a content, process, and format perspective, the findings suggest a variety of experiences in relation to the HR early-onboarding process. These differing experiences and the varying level of interaction with HR in the onboarding process, suggest a range of experiences, both positive and negative, but with minimal impact. An alternative interpretation is that HR onboarding in the early onboarding stages might have been essential at the time, but became less relevant and impactful, over time. An additional observation supporting this that it often took long for respondents to recall, reflect on, and answer questions related to HR onboarding practices.

Overall, the findings are in line with the propositions deduced from the literature. To conclude, in isolation, early HR onboarding influences the psychological contract, but negative experiences do not lead to a breach or violation. HR has a role to play in the onboarding process; but findings were mixed on its influence on the psychological contract. This variation of influence could be attributed to the interpretation of experience by respondents. Factors that seem to influence this include prior knowledge of the company, knowing others who work or worked in the company before joining, personal preferences, personal interest on topics, the impact of COVID-19 and the differing modes of onboarding (i.e. face-to-face versus online sessions).

- *4.2.1.2. Role of Supervisors*

*Sub Proposition 1b) stated: Supervisor support plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract.*

The findings suggest that the supervisor featured as a critical part of integration for a new employee in the early onboarding stages. Most respondents indicated that the ‘welcoming’ part of their first day and first few days included the supervisor showing them around the workplace and introducing them to other employees in the department. In most cases, the supervisor also presented a formal overview of the divisional and departmental strategy

and structure. Practically speaking, the supervisor also appeared to be the central coordinator in ensuring that the new employees received their laptops and supported in granting them access to relevant systems and access required for various programmes and applications. Conversations around work goals and expectations were also initiated in the early onboarding stage to ensure alignment and clarify expectations. To integrate the new employee into their specific work projects, the supervisor ensured introductions to the relevant persons and support structures, these introductions took place from the employee's first week through to their first month. The psychological contract was positively influenced where the supervisor was approachable, open to questions, and showed general interest in supporting their new employees with whatever was required.

It is important to note that in orientation and integration of employees into the company, a supervisor who showed a 'dedication to upskill' as one respondent phrased it, reassures the new employee that opportunities for growth and development are possible. In all cases, respondents described a professional and good working relationship with their supervisors. Even in instances where the supervisor was unable to directly answer or support the employee due to not having the information or the time, they were able to refer them to an alternative person in the organisation or provided an idea for a way forward. This was still acknowledged by respondents as supervisor support. The supervisor support was therefore a positive experience. Another example of the positive influence on the psychological contract was where an employee explained that the supervisor listened to them and was open to suggestions. This made them feel that their voice was heard and respected. This led to the fulfillment of the psychological contract as the employee felt respected, supported, reassured, and enabled to understand and meet work, team, and process expectations.

It was therefore concluded that the findings are in line with the proposition deduced from the literature. The supervisor does play a vital role in the onboarding process and can positively influence the psychological contract.

- 4.2.1.3. *Role of the Team*

*Sub Proposition 1c) stated: Team support plays a key role in early onboarding, influencing the initial psychological contract.*

As mentioned with sub proposition 1, b) the supervisor played a key role in facilitating early integration for a new employee. However, the findings show that when the supervisor was sometimes too busy to spend time with the new employee. Team members would then *step in* to fulfil this role. This either would be at the supervisor's request, or occurred spontaneously with team members offering to support the new employee, often due to them simply being near one another (e.g., the same physical office space). Support was provided by showing new team members around the work premises and answering any questions they might have on how things are done, or what to find where. In most cases, this support and interaction were informal and unplanned.

From the interview data set, team support mostly took the form of knowledge sharing and training. In one example, this was through job shadowing. An employee shadowed their teammate from whom they would be taking over from, and they were able to follow and learn about the projects and tasks within one month. In another example, a new employee had virtual team members, who were working in different countries, but had no locally based direct team members. Despite this, they could still socially connect with other locals and discuss work topics with colleagues who were working on similar projects with other teams, and they enjoyed 'cross-team collaboration' in problem-solving or brainstorming. For another respondent, the support they received from their team was in the form of planned training, where they were shown exactly what was required and were provided with clear guidelines and documentation.

Team support was further noted as a team environment characterised by friendly and accommodating colleagues, who were willing to support and share knowledge, either in a planned or spontaneous way. Where employees had support and engagement with local colleagues, both direct or indirect team members (i.e. indirect team members refers to team members situated in other work projects but still employed in the same division or department), this positively influenced the psychological contract leading to a fulfilled psychological contract. This is due to employees being able to work in an environment that

promoted social connection, creating a sense of belonging. In addition, this positively influenced the psychological contract, as new members could engage with like-minded professionals, which created a channel for continuous engagement and communication for collaboration, which enabled and empowered employees to meet their individual work goals and tasks. This empowerment (or fulfilment of the psychological contract) was either by receiving new information or training from team members or teamwork finding creative ways to approach a task.

An additional theme was that team support was also defined more broadly by some respondents, with team support simply being seen as teamwork and working together effectively. Where an employee felt a lack of coordination and accountability in the team (e.g. other team members not pulling their weight), this created a breach in the psychological contract, indicating that they would be inclined to leave the organisation if this did not change. They also stated that other employees might feel this way too. Any negative experience of a lack of team support created frustration and the feeling of not effectively progressing in their function, or slowed down their ability to deliver efficiently on their tasks.

A further additional theme that created a new perspective to contextualise team support was the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees who joined the company just before the pandemic had the opportunity to meet their team members, which supported work projects, as they were able to establish a human or personal connection with their colleagues and thereafter transitioning to online working. Other employees who joined at the start of the pandemic, or during the lockdown, noted that they were used to working remotely but did want some face-to-face interaction, which later became possible when restrictions were lifted. Hybrid and rotation models of work became possible. One respondent stated that they had wanted to see the face of their colleague, to see what they looked like, since they had only been working with them via written and voice communication. Only at a later stage, were they able to meet. Yet other respondents alluded to the importance of face-to-face interactions, such as walking to a colleague's desk to ask them questions, or chatting about work topics while having a smoke break. It was therefore concluded that the findings are in line with the propositions deduced from the literature. The team environment and

support provided by team members play a vital role in the onboarding process and positively influence the psychological contract.

#### 4.2.2. Performance discussions

*Proposition 2 stated: Performance discussions influence the psychological contract.*

The literature proposes that there has been a shift in how performance management is managed in organisations, from a strict and structured approach to a more flexible approach (Stiles et al., 2007). Performance discussions are ongoing and are characterised by constructive and two-way feedback and are also an opportunity for the supervisor to give encouragement and support where required (Sommer & Kulkarni, 2002). The initial stages of performance management for new employees could take a probation period, which is a more structured process and is prescribed by South African legislation (Baloyi & Crafford, 2006). Probation is an opportunity for an employer to assess that an employee can perform at the expected standard (Baloyi & Crafford, 2006). In this process, where there are reasonable gaps, development or training opportunities can be identified (Baloyi & Crafford, 2006).

Most respondents indicated that due to the structure of the work projects and tasks, although direct supervisors were responsible for them as employees, they did not always have a direct line of sight or ‘control’ over their actual work. Yet they were responsible for the probation process and conducting performance management discussions. In other words, a project leader who was not the supervisor would be responsible for managing performance and progress of daily tasks. Therefore, to conduct these probations or performance discussions, it was important for the employee to contribute to the discussion actively and, in addition, for the supervisor to get feedback from other stakeholders (e.g. project leader) involved in the employee’s work such as the project leader and clients, to fairly assess performance and give feedback. In most cases, the direct supervisor was able to provide feedback only for some tasks or elements of the project.

Discussions between supervisor and employee were characterised by the progress of goals or tasks outlined in prior meetings, including any challenges that the employee faced. The supervisor could then support the employee by finding ways to remove or minimise these challenges or obstacles. The frequency of these discussions varied case by case, and seemed to be primarily dependent on the availability and schedule of the direct supervisor. The frequency also varied, with discussions

being held anywhere from every two weeks, monthly or even quarterly. These discussions were value adding, with constructive feedback leading to a fulfilled psychological contract.

Where the feedback received by the employee mirrored their perception of their contribution, or where the supervisor gave even more positive feedback than the employee expected, this supported the maintenance of a fulfilled psychological contract. In one outlier example, the supervisor helped the employee in adjusting their expectations of themselves. In this example, the employee was initially overwhelmed regarding the work expectations and felt incompetent. After discussing this with their supervisor, the manager clarified that they expect “excellence but not perfection”. This encouraged the employee to reframe the work project and helped them adjust their expectations to what was required, thus supporting their integration as a more productive and satisfied employee. In this instance, this resulted in an over-fulfilled psychological contract.

In another example, the supervisor could not give ‘proper’ individual feedback on their performance from the employee's perspective. Instead, the feedback they received was more on how the team was performing. The team had not been performing effectively. The individual input from the employee’s perspective did not mirror the effort and contribution that they had made and so they felt that they had been ‘lumped’ into one team assessment that was not necessarily accurate. This negatively influenced the psychological contract, especially since it was feedback reflecting team performance and there was no acknowledgement of their individual contribution. In this instance, the respondent did not blame the supervisor, and the situation was not personalised. Instead, the dissatisfaction, which negatively influenced the psychological contract, came from the structure of the work team, and was compounded by the confusing reporting structures and lack of proper project planning within the project itself.

Based on this set of findings on performance discussions, it is concluded that the findings are in line with the propositions deduced from the literature in that performance discussions do influence the psychological contract.

#### 4.2.3. Employee development

*Proposition 3: Employee development opportunities are a source of motivation in the fulfilment of the psychological contract.*

Broadly, development for new employees is defined as any form of initiative or activity, whether informal or formal, planned or spontaneous, that supports an employee in their progression, albeit in their career, function, or project (Holton, 1996; Hameed & Waheed, 2011).

In the findings, employee development referred to planned and unplanned training and information sharing, which was either general or specific in nature. Some respondents indicated that receiving information about how the company operates and having insight into what other projects and other teams in the division were working on gave them a contextual understanding of their work. This was further complemented with the learning of interacting with different team members from diverse backgrounds on an ongoing basis. This broad access and information from meetings and shared platforms supported the new employee's development to support their overall performance and integration.

Although also mentioned for sub proposition 1c), team support came through consistently as a source of development. Most of the respondents indicated that there had been an opportunity for technical training to support their on-the-job performance. This was either through informal knowledge sharing or having access to a training platform for specialised technical training. This platform was paid for through a corporate license subscription made available by the supervisor, giving the employees the flexibility to select relevant training for themselves. While during performance or feedback discussions the supervisor might have hinted towards specific training courses deemed suitable for the employee, it was primarily up to the employee to personally identify what training to participate in. Some respondents also shared that the supervisor had identified group needs and recommended training for the team to attend. In another example, where a group need was identified, the supervisor coordinated weekly sessions, where each team member on rotation could conduct research and then make a presentation on a subject relevant to the team. This initiative by the supervisor became an opportunity for a type of 'exchange and discussion' session – a variation of team support and knowledge sharing. However, there were also different situations for employee development, where one interviewee was studying a degree parallel to working, and this development was tracked and discussed in regular supervisor updates.

Respondents noted that having the company promote an environment that supports and encourages employee development was crucial. In other words, having the freedom to approach, interact, discuss, and problem-solve with different colleagues on work topics was critical to both integration and employee development. Most respondents consistently highlighted the importance of an environment that supports development as the primary trigger factor that helped fulfill the psychological contract. One employee suggested that it should be the norm to share information and knowledge openly in the workplace. The respondent confirmed that the current work environment encourages and supports this norm. To them, this was important to point out, as they had experienced other work environments where there the culture of that organisation had created a fear to approach others for help.

All respondents noted the company providing access to a training platform through its corporate license was a crucial part of their ongoing on-the-job training. This was affirmed by responses like ‘the learning opportunities are amazing’ and ‘I love learning.’ This corresponds with the personal motivation of employees as to why they decided to take the new job offer and join the company initially, to enhance career growth and learning opportunities. This illustrates how the idea of employee development was central to their motivation, underpinning their individual decision-making process to take the position.

Feedback and discussions as an outcome of progress or performance discussions with the supervisor also can be noted as part of employee development. At times, interviewees gave practical examples of how the supervisor guided or encouraged them to interact or participate in the workplace and adapt to the organisation's culture. An example used to illustrate this was when an employee stated that they were uncertain about interacting with specific colleagues. The supervisor then openly discussed this with the employee giving practical tips on dealing with the colleagues in the context of the diversity in the work environment and culture.

It is also important to note that some respondents were not fully aware of what formal training or development opportunities were available to them through the company and were unsure about career progression opportunities. This then leads on to the additional theme that arose was around medium-longer-term development opportunities. The questions mostly elicited immediate or recent experience, but some respondents also gave ideas about their future development. As newer employees to the organisation, the focus was on the integration, and current or immediate

development needs to ensure a smooth transition to perform at an expected level. The psychological contract was therefore satisfied as current growth needs were satisfied. However, an emergent theme was medium to long-term development opportunities and the ability of the company to respond, react and grow with the needs of the individual. These new employees, although still transitioning into a new job, already were able to indicate their medium-long-term development goals with the following remarks (paraphrased):

- Some of the skills I have are not being utilised, which means I can become outdated in my field. Sometimes I can only update my skills by doing and being part of projects that practically need these skills.
- I would be happy to stay in the same position, but I don't want to get bored; I like to be challenged.
- I do not see myself in the future in my current position; however, I can see anything that would symbolize growth.
- I want to become more managerial, but I am still in discussions with my supervisor.

The above statements point towards the psychological contract itself as dynamic, with the ability to change over time. If employee development is a source of motivation and growth that is critical to employees, it would be necessary for the organisation to monitor this to ensure that training and development opportunities continue to be available.

It is concluded that the findings are in line with the propositions deduced from the literature. Employee development influences the psychological contract and provides a source of motivation. This is supported and best summarised from the literature as follows: "Employees' expectations change as they move through the early, middle, and late periods of their careers. At the beginning of their careers, employees want to achieve acceptance by colleagues and management, while others in the mid-career stage may seek new challenges. This indicates that employees want to work for companies that will enable them to achieve a sense of intrinsic satisfaction. If organizations do not devise programs to deal with this in meaningful ways, employee turnover may increase" (Pillay, Dawood & Karodia, 2015, p. 5).

#### 4.2.4. Employment conditions and working environment

*Proposition 4 stated: Employment conditions influence the fulfilment of the psychological contract.*

A general understanding of employment conditions can be summarised as "...employees will perceive an organisation that treats its employees fairly and with consideration (e.g., good working conditions, merit pay, training, and career development opportunities) as an organisation, that has met its contractual obligations to them under the psychological contract" (Winter & Jackson, 2006, p. 424).

The idea of employment conditions and the working environment did influence the fulfilment of the psychological contract. Especially in the pandemic and COVID-19, new hires expressed appreciation for being hired permanently, which included benefits that were deemed competitive and satisfactory. This was against the backdrop where other companies or industries were reducing their workforce. In this context, majority of respondents were satisfied with their compensation and benefits offered and received by the company. For successful completion of their probation period, those who had received an increase, greatly appreciated it.

The pandemic has also been the catalyst for the development and further entrenchment of practice around flexible work arrangements. Many respondents acknowledged the benefit of the current hybrid-working model of being on a rotation basis to work some days in the office and some days from home. The preference for a hybrid work arrangement was also expressed under sub proposition 1c) regarding getting to know and interact with team members in a physical office environment. The hybrid model also allowed for the remote working opportunity. For one respondent, this meant working from home, which meant less distraction to focus on work tasks. For another respondent, working from home meant being in a more comfortable environment (for example, sitting near a window for natural light). Having a hybrid-working model positively influenced the psychological contract. This indicates that a completely remote working arrangement could lead to a lack of fulfilment of the psychological contract, as the face-to-face and informal interactions in the office enabled social connection. However, the hybrid model led to the fulfilment of the psychological contract as employees felt more comfortable and safer in the midst of the pandemic.

For early onboarding, receiving the right resources to start one's job was critical to becoming a productive and value-adding employee quickly. Many respondents experienced delays in receiving their work laptops timeously with further delay in receiving the necessary access rights to specific systems or applications required to start learning and working. These delays generally caused frustration, as they were not enabled or empowered to deliver on work. However, this only had a minor influence and did not lead to any breach of the psychological contract.

In the findings, from a task or project perspective, where employees had some degree of autonomy to problem-solve or be creative in implementing specific ideas, this supported the fulfilment of the psychological contract. On the other hand, for another respondent, a lack of uniformity in processes, combined with unclear roles, a lack of coordination, and insufficient project planning, led to a breach in the psychological contract. The respondent indicated that if a better opportunity comes up they are likely to resign; however, they remain hopeful that their situation at work can improve. In this example, the breach was not a once-off experience but somewhat cumulative and sustained over some time. From these findings, it is concluded that the findings are in line with the propositions deduced from the literature, in that employment conditions influenced the formation and fulfilment of the psychological contract.

#### 4.3. CONTRIBUTION OF ROLE PLAYERS IN EARLY INTEGRATION

It is essential to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the propositions in creating a meaningful and value-adding integration and onboarding experience for new employees. So far, each proposition was examined on its own. To examine in-depth that specific aspect of the experience and ascertain its influence on the psychological contract, it is also necessary to integrate the insights on the separate propositions to create a holistic view.

As mentioned in the literature, each organisation will have its way in which onboarding takes place (Chillakuri, 2020). However, the elements of this remain consistent—the literature contained in the propositions supported in assessing this. The critical role players who all have a part to play during early onboarding include HR, the direct supervisor, and the team that the new employee is joining. From the findings and discussion, HR plays a role at the beginning of the onboarding process to ensure that a general orientation on the main organisational topics has been covered. Following this general orientation by HR, it becomes crucial for the supervisor to provide a more

detailed context for new employees concerning additional organisational and departmental information. Further to this, the supervisor supports the initial integration of the new employee by ensuring that they have the necessary informational context and the necessary equipment and resources to do their work and know what is expected of them in terms of work tasks and outputs. The supervisor is also the access point to ensure the new employee is introduced to the team and is aware of the structure, including who they can contact for various topics.

The supervisor's early onboarding activities and effort seem to be conducted within the first few weeks of the new employee arriving in the team. After that, supervisor support continues and is maintained through performance discussions, feedback, and supporting or advising on development opportunities. The nature of these discussions is either structured or ad hoc, depending on the supervisor's relationship, the employee's need, and the supervisor's availability. What is clear is that, regardless of frequency, if the connection is characterised by open dialogue, constructive feedback, and general support and encouragement, this leads to the fulfilment of the psychological contract.

After their first few weeks of settling in, the most significant contributor to successful onboarding and integration for new employees is team support. A team environment characterised by knowledge sharing and social connection, which promoted ongoing collaboration and teamwork, was vital for influencing and maintaining a fulfilled psychological contract. From the findings, team support was mostly informal or unplanned, and this support ranged from showing a colleague around to brainstorming an idea, asking for help, or feeling that they could rely on their team to pull their weight.

It is important to note that the onboarding experience as a new employee, transitions between each role player (i.e. HR, supervisor, and team) for his or her respective type of support during an employee's integration phase, but not necessarily in a linear fashion. The interactions and sessions with and between the role players and new employees can occur in parallel, or simultaneously.

This recommendation would support the pattern of the findings. That is, where a respondent started their onboarding positively, this seemed to continue throughout other onboarding activities; and if there was a delay or mismatched expectation, this was perceived as minor with minimal influence on the psychological contract. Where a respondent described the beginning of their onboarding negatively, this seemed to continue throughout the description of their current work experiences,

highlighting that those negative experiences cumulatively had more influence on the psychological contract. In one instance these cumulative negative experiences had led to a breach in the psychological contract.

In conclusion, to ensure a more visible and consistent process, a recommendation is that HR plays a more coordinated role in putting various structures or mechanisms in place to guide or track the timeline of activities for new employees in collaboration with the direct supervisor to support their overall integration. This will ensure that there is coordinated effort specifically for planned or formal activities. This coordination would also provide a consistent approach and ensure that 'doses' of new information or support are injected at the right time in the right amount for the new employee as they settle into the organisation, team, and role.

#### 4.4. EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON WORK AND THE WORKPLACE

A theme that was not foreseen when the research was initially conceived, was the contextual influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on work and the workplace. This has shaped a new employee's journey within the organisation.

The pandemic, for example, shaped the content of induction, where part of the formal sessions planned had a specific induction presentation on COVID-19 with the health and safety rules and compliance measures that the company took and required employees to comply with. This positively influenced the psychological contract as employees felt that their work environment was safe. Employees at this time worked fully remotely.

Later, this way of working transitioned into a hybrid way of working when it was possible. This also had a positive influence on the psychological contract as most respondents enjoyed the flexibility of working from home and the office. With this shift to less 'physical time' spent in the office, further respect and value were placed on social connection and team support. This is because not everyone could be physically present in the office at the same time; therefore, a rotation working model was introduced. However, despite this, there were still structures in place, such as planned team meetings to ensure opportunities for engagement and check-ins to discuss the progression of tasks and goal achievement with their supervisor and team.

Another example, which highlighted the influence of the pandemic, was where an interviewee mentioned that they did not understand company culture before COVID-19. Therefore, remote

working was the way in which they acclimatised into the organisation, which was during the national lockdown. This made it more difficult for them to initially meet and build social connection with their local peers. In contrast, another respondent had joined the organisation before the pandemic and had the opportunity to go overseas to meet the team they would be working with virtually (despite the pandemic they would have worked remotely with this team). They mentioned that having had this once-off face-to-face meet-up had made it easier for them to work virtually with the team in the months that followed.

Ideas such as virtual collaboration have been drawn from the literature to support this additional theme. The changing nature of work due to technology has been developing worldwide. Some of the challenges around this include ensuring that organisations can still find ways to build trust, commitment, and motivation while maintaining clear communication channels (Pinjani & Palvia, 2007). One way to ensure this is for organisations' to "focus on the collaborative aspects of technology" (Pinjani & Palvia, 2007, p. 150).

Further to this, it would be important when having team meetings to ensure that there is a planned agenda with specific topics being pre-prepared with post-meeting actions practices being in place to ensure full engagement of team members (Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007). Especially relevant for the new way of working, "hybrid teams rely on both electronic technology as well as on face-to-face communication" (Klonek, Kanse, Wee, Runneboom & Parker, 2021, p.3). The degree to which teams work virtually compared to virtually can also change over differing periods (Klonek et al., 2021). The pandemic ensured acceleration for new ways of working in the virtual space to keep businesses running (Klonek et al., 2021). Research has ..." indicated that macro-temporal events such as the COVID-19 pandemic could influence virtual team processes and showed that after a sustained period of working remotely during the pandemic, teams adapted to virtual work, with teams in the early phase of the pandemic leading to more inefficient team processes than teams in a later stage" (Klonek et al., 2021).

#### 4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented and discussed the findings of the research. Each of the propositions that were deduced from the literature were matched using the codebook and discussed in light of the findings from the data set. This chapter highlighted the various role players and activities, which had an influence on the psychological contract in early stages of integration. The findings are discussed in the context of RBT and talent management, which both emphasise that an organisation should value its employees for building long-term competitive advantage and business success.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

This is the concluding chapter for this research. This chapter will summarise the main findings while highlighting the implications and the recommendations that come from this. This last chapter will also indicate the parameters around delimitations and limitations and the opportunity for future research.

### 5.2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In the context of talent management practice in the broader frame of sustainable HRM, this study aimed to analyse talent management practices of recently hired employees from the psychological contract perspective. The early integration experience of new employees was evaluated to see how various experiences influenced or affected the psychological contract. The key findings related to each of the propositions is as follows:

- *Proposition 1: All integrative processes in early onboarding influence the initial psychological contract of the employee.* Proposition 1, including its sub propositions, show that all role players, including HR, supervisor, and the team, play a critical role in integration for a new employee. As the literature and findings both demonstrate, how onboarding practices and activities are structured will vary from organization to organization, resulting in varying employee experiences. However, the leading role-players remain. Team support was the most important influencer on the psychological contract (whether positive or negative), followed by supervisor support and HR.
- *Proposition 2: Performance discussions influence the psychological contract:* Where a supervisor provided an employee with value-adding and constructive feedback regarding performance and support for areas of development, this led to the fulfillment of the psychological contract. This is because it made the employee feel supported and enabled them to achieve their tasks or improve their ability. What is critical is that the quality of these interactions was more effective or impactful than the frequency or timing of the sessions.

- *Proposition 3: Employee development opportunities are a source of motivation in the fulfilment of the psychological contract:* Growth and development opportunities are seen as a vital source of motivation and therefore led to fulfilment of the psychological contract. The findings for this proposition also highlighted that the psychological contract is dynamic, in that development needs will change over time, which organisations need to monitor.
- *Proposition 4 stated: Employment conditions influence the fulfilment of the psychological contract:* Having the right resources and access to fulfilling work expectations with some degree of autonomy was seen as important and led to the satisfaction of the psychological contract, as employees felt enabled and empowered to deliver on projects and tasks. In addition, the flexibility to work in a hybrid working model (from home and the office in a rotation format) led to the fulfilment of the psychological contract as it allowed employees to feel safe and comfortable.

All the propositions collectively highlight that alongside a structured process of onboarding process there are some common principles that can support the transition of a new employee. These common principles include availability and access to information and resources timeous and helpful responses from key role players this led to the fulfilment of the psychological contract as it made employees feel welcome, comfortable, cared for and clear on company and role expectations.

### 5.3. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS

Organisations can create experiences for individuals in the early stages of their integration, which can positively influence the psychological contract. If well-structured and well timed, onboarding practices can offer consistent and much-needed information and networks for new employees to support them in their journey in navigating the new organisational or team environment. The essential precondition for this is coordination and planned effort, first taking a bird's eye view to appreciate the interconnected experience from the perspective of the key role players of HR, supervisor, and team and the impact all these role players have.

Further to this, it is also essential to acknowledge the weighted impact these key role players have in a new employee's experience. From this study, what became evident is that HR plays a role in

ensuring that foundation information was provided to support the supervisor's effort, who then became the 'access point' for the new employee into team integration.

A macro event such as the COVID-19 pandemic also created a new lens to view integration for a new employee in the workplace. This became an additional layer for the organisations to evaluate how hybrid and flexible work arrangements influence the psychological contract for new employees. In addition, online and technological modes of interaction are accessible and effective; effectiveness might be reduced if there are limited or no face-to-face opportunities for employees to engage with the environment.

Due to this shift being new, this was expressed as a preference, but with time, this work arrangement and flexibility could become a work condition expectation. Therefore, the recommendation would be for an organisation to consider their post-pandemic approach and policy towards flexible work arrangement, not merely as an adaptive response to the pandemic, but as a new way of working. The pandemic has allowed the organisation to evaluate how quickly it could adapt, and identify lessons learned, to prepare for future changes and scenarios.

Another recommendation would be for HR to support the business and ultimately new employees by continuously reviewing best practices and improving the digital infrastructure and process that supports onboarding (Jesuthasan, 2017). By evaluating onboarding in the context of this digital shift, HR would be playing its role as the strategic partner and employee champion to support sustainable HRM (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2019; Jesuthasan, 2017). This recommendation is supported by other literature in the context of younger employees entering the organisation from a Generation-Z age group, who are "digital natives" and would like to work for organisations that value digital solutions (Chillakuri, 2020).

## 5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

### 5.4.1. DELIMITATIONS

This research focussed on one single organisation as a case study, and the sample was selected from within this organisation. The sample parameters revolved around the start date in the organisation to define the term 'recently hired' to new employees who had been with the organisation for 12-18 months. The focus was not on employees who had been internally promoted, but instead on those who had been appointed externally.

Recommendations for future studies include:

- In addition to new employees, interview additional role players involved in the process of integrating new employees, including HR, team members, and supervisors.
- The sample consisted only of office-based employees who offered support services to the core operations of the business of the organisation. Further research could investigate the experience of integration and onboarding into the organization of those new employees whose nature of work was not office-based and offering service support, but who worked directly in the production areas.
- Evaluate the employee integration and onboarding experience of those employees who are already internal to the company but have moved inter-departmentally. The value of such a study would be to provide an in-depth focus on the roles played by the team and supervisor in integration.

#### 5.4.2. LIMITATIONS

The qualitative nature of this research means that it does not try to be representative, or suggest that the findings reflect the view of all the employees in the organization. Nevertheless, the sample for this study contained eight interviewees. It is also important to acknowledge that the participants selected for the study were predominantly from one area within one organisation. In addition, only eight employees were interviewed for this study for their insights and perspectives. With more employee interviews, there would have been a greater variety of experiences to analyse, thereby increasing the chance of reaching data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

#### 5.5. CONTRIBUTION

For this research, the delimitations and limitations have been recognised. However, it is important to note the value of the research findings. The findings have been analysed and interpreted from a theoretical perspective, drawing recommendations and ideas for practical implementation. The research highlights the necessity of ensuring that a holistic and coordinated approach to integration and onboarding from a sustainable HRM and talent management perspective for new employees influences and maintains the fulfilment of the psychological contract. It further places emphasis that this fulfilment of the psychological contract, especially in the early integration of a new

employee, is of mutual benefit for the employee and organisation. A satisfied employee who is enabled and empowered from the beginning becomes productive and can add value. This becomes not only about the employer fulfilling or reciprocating its obligations but also creating mutual benefit for both parties in influencing the foundation for a medium to a long-term employer and employee relationship. Given the importance of the early experiences of new employees to the formation of their psychological contract, and the dearth of research in this area, it is recommended that further research of this nature be conducted to build on the insights of this study.

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## APPENDIX A- GATEKEEPER PERMISSION



### ACCESS LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Rhodes University  
Drostdy Road,  
Grahamstown,  
6139

*[Company Name Withheld]*  
*[Company Address Withheld]*

Dear *[Relevant Company Gatekeeper Name Withheld]*

### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am a registered Master's student in the Department of the Business School at Rhodes University. My supervisor is Professor Noel Pearse ([n.pearse@ru.ac.za](mailto:n.pearse@ru.ac.za)).

The proposed topic of my research is an analysis of the talent management of recently hired employees from the perspective of the probation period and psychological contract.

The objectives of the study are:

- (a) From the perspective of the psychological contract, specifically with focus on its transactional content, the aim of this research is to analyse talent management practices, specifically in the initial stage of employment, the probation phase. This will be viewed from the perspective of the employee's experience. The overall aim of this research is to evaluate and analyse how talent management practice has affected the psychological contract. The published thesis will be silent on the identity of the Company and not use its name. The goals of this research are to analyse 1) How talent management practices have affected the psychological contract 2) How employees have responded or intend to respond if there has been a breach in the contract. 3) How employees have responded or intend to respond if their expectations of the psychological contract have been met.

I am hereby seeking your consent to interview employees at the company. To assist you in reaching a decision, I have attached to this letter:

- (a) A copy of an ethical clearance certificate issued by the University
- (b) A copy of the interview guide I intend to use

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics  
Ethics Coordinator [ethics@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics@ru.ac.za)  
t: +27 (0)48 603 1727 f: +27 (0)48 603 1728  
Room 202, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139.

## APPENDIX B- INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**

*Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa*

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RHODES BUSINESS SCHOOL  
Tel: [+27] 046 603 8617  
E-mail: [n.pearse@ru.ac.za](mailto:n.pearse@ru.ac.za)

01 November 2020

*[Company Address Withheld]*

Dear Participant

**Re: Invitation to participate in research study**

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled the analysis of the talent management of recently hired employees from the perspective of the probation period and psychological contract. The aim of this research is to evaluate and analyse how talent management practice, in the context of probation, has affected the psychological contract. Your participation and cooperation is important so that the results of the research are accurately portrayed. It is important that you are aware that this study has been approved by a Research Ethics Committee of the University.

The research undertaken is qualitative in nature and the data to be collected from this research will be through semi-structured interviews. Your identity and that of the Company will be treated with complete confidentiality. The interview will require approximately an hour of your time. Please note that the interview will be recorded, purely for transcribing purposes.

We will provide you with the necessary information to assist you in understanding the study. In addition, what is expected of you as a participant will also be explained prior to the interview itself.

Participation is completely voluntary and this letter of invitation does not obligate you to take part in this research study. To participate, you will be required to provide written consent that will include your signature, date and initials to indicate that you understand and agree to the conditions. Please note that you have the right to withdraw at any given time during the study.]

Thank you for your time and I hope that you will find our request favourable.

If you require further information kindly contact Supervisor Professor Noel Pearse on [n.pearse@ru.ac.za](mailto:n.pearse@ru.ac.za) or Ethics Coordinator Mr Siyanda Manqele on [s.mangele@ru.ac.za](mailto:s.mangele@ru.ac.za).

Yours sincerely,  
Ms. Olivia Bischoff  
Research Student

## APPENDIX C- INDIVIDUAL CONSENT FORM

### PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

(Participant)

Project Title:

“An analysis of the talent management of recently hired employees from the perspective of the probation period and psychological contract”

*Olivia Bischoff* from the Department of Rhodes University Business School has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research is to analyse talent management practices in the initial stage of employment, specifically the probation phase. This will be viewed from the perspective of the employee's experience.
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project, clearance number 2020-2730-4809. I am aware that I may request to see the clearance certificate if required by contacting Mr. Siyanda Manqele (s.manqele@ru.ac.za).
3. By participating in this research project, I will be contributing towards the development of talent management practice in the Company. The research may confirm the effectiveness of current processes and approaches in the Company or identify areas of improvement for practical use when assessing talent management strategy.
4. I will participate in the project by answering questions guided by a semi-structured interview for 60 minutes. I will answer the questions to the best of my ability and indicate to the researcher where I do not feel comfortable answering a specific question I will indicate this to the researcher.
5. My participation is voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.

6. I will not be compensated in any form for participating in the research.
7. The following risks are associated with my participation: I am aware that to mitigate risk, details of participation will remain anonymous. Any identifiable information will be removed from the research accordingly. Voice recorded interviews consented to will be available only to the researcher and potentially the supervisor. It will be kept on file for 5 years as per University policy and be deleted after 5 years. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to it. It will not be distributed and held in a password-protected location.
8. The Principal Investigator intends possibly in the future to publish the research results in the form of an academic article. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained. My name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conducting of the research.
9. I will not receive feedback unless requested from the researcher. However, I expect to see a summary of individual interview findings shown to me to confirm accurate capture of discussion.
10. I agree with the Principal Investigator's use of voice recording of my comments and opinions during interviews. Mark with an X: Agree OR Disagree.
11. Any further questions regarding the research or my participation can be directed towards supervisor Prof. Noel Pearse, [n.pearse@ru.ac.za](mailto:n.pearse@ru.ac.za).
12. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies.
13. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I, ....., have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

.....  
**Participants signature**

.....  
**Date**

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics

Ethics Coordinator: [ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)

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Room 220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139

## APPENDIX D- INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Interview Guide

DURATION IN MINUTES	ITEM
5	CANDIDATE CONSENT
	Completed individual consent form
15	BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTIONS
	Welcome participant and give short overview of the research and aims Provide a description of the company and explanation of the job.
	----- Explain the interview process.
40	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
4 Questions	INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? What is your background?</li> <li>• What motivated you to apply to MBSA/this position?</li> <li>• How long have you now been in this position?</li> <li>• What have you enjoyed most since starting at the Company? OR Any experience that has stood out for you since you started in this position?</li> </ul>
6 Questions	Proposition 1: All integrative processes contained in early onboarding influences the initial psychological contract of the employee.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From what you knew prior to joining MBSA have your expectations been met? Please give examples to explain your answer.</li> <li>• What type of activities supported your integration at MBSA when you first started?</li> <li>• Prompt Questions: What type of activities did HR, Supervisor, Team support with?</li> <li>• What took place prior to your first day of joining?</li> <li>• What took place in your first week at work?</li> <li>• What took place in your first month at work?</li> <li>• Based on where you are now, how settled do you feel in your function/team and organization as a whole? (Prompt: Anything that could have supported your integration more into your function/team/organization?)</li> </ul>

5 Questions	Proposition 2: Performance discussions influence the psychological contract  Proposition 3: Employee development opportunities are a source of motivation in the fulfillment of the psychological contract
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you have a structured probation/performance management process? Yes/No</li> <li>• What was the experience of this process for you? (Prompt: How was it structured? Was it value adding?)</li> <li>• Do you receive constructive feedback regarding development on your probation/performance reviews?</li> <li>• Since employment confirmation/after the first few months how is your performance being managed now?</li> <li>• How is your relationship with your manager?</li> <li>• Do they actively support you in identifying areas for development to help you perform better in your function?            Prompt: If yes, how so? What did this look like? (E.g. career planning, rotation, coaching, trainings etc.)</li> </ul>
3 Questions	Proposition 4: Employment conditions influence the fulfillment of the psychological contract
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has anything changed since? If not yet, do you expect anything to change? E.g. compensation/benefits/other examples (1-2)</li> <li>• How do you find your current work environment?</li> <li>• Can you see yourself long-term in your current position within this department?</li> </ul>
5	CONCLUSION
	Provide contact information should applicant have further questions.
	Thank the applicant for their time.
	EVALUATION: Code and theme observations and discussion outcomes
TOTAL TIME IN MINUTES	
60	

## APPENDIX E- CODING MANUAL

<i>Proposition</i>	<i>Label</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Criteria: Inclusion and Exclusion</i>
Applicable to all propositions 1-4	Psychological Contract (PC): Fulfilled PC; Over-Fulfilled PC; Breach PC; Violation PC	"The term psychological contract refers to an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party" (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123). (Conway and Briner, 2002)	PC can be fulfilled or over-fulfilled which leads to a range of positive expressions about environment/situation/example used or PC can be breached or violated leading to negative expressions regarding the environment/situation/example used	
Proposition 1: All integrative processes contained in early onboarding influence the initial psychological contract of the employee.	Formal and Informal Onboarding Processes (FOP and IOP); Psychological Contract	Onboarding are the deliberate informal and formal initiatives that the organization facilitates in order to socialize and support employee adjustment and success into the workplace and into his/her role (Becker and Bish, 2019).	FOP: Formal induction sessions and trainings set up by HR, supervisor or team in first months of employment. IOP: Adhoc/informally requested HR, peer or supervisor support	Inclusion: Induction sessions, resource allocation, meet and greet sessions, tours, training. Exclusion: Probation/performance discussions and employee initiating meetings/discussions
Sub Proposition 1a) HR plays a key role in early onboarding influencing the initial psychological contract	HR Support (HS)		Information around rules, regulations, company strategy and overview provided	
Sub Proposition 1b) Supervisor support plays a key role in early onboarding influencing the initial psychological contract	Supervisor Support (SS)		Support provided by information sharing, introductions to team and/ relevant networks, appointment of mentor, clarification of work tasks	
Sub Proposition 1c) Team plays a key role in early onboarding influencing the initial psychological contract	Team Support (TS)		Social interactions or connection with team, knowledge sharing	
Proposition 2: Performance discussions influence the psychological contract	Performance Discussion (PD)	Performance management is about the employer and employee setting up the initial goals and tasks with clear objectives followed by regular discussions to evaluate performance characterized by constructive feedback. The performance management process will also establish if the employee requires any additional support or development to support their in-role performance. (Stiles, Gratton, Bailey, Hope-Hailey and McGovern, 2007; Restubog, Bordie and Tang, 2006).	Formal and informal discussions with supervisor that take place in the initial stages of employment to set targets, evaluate performance and/or identify support to improve performance	Inclusion: Performance and probation evaluations linked to job requirements. Exclusion: Extra-role work behaviours not required part of in-role job requirements
Proposition 3: Employee development opportunities are a source of motivation in the fulfillment of the psychological contract	Employee Development (ED)	"New employee development (NED) is defined as all development processes used to advance new employees to desired levels of performance. It encompasses all development activities in which an organization engages, whether they are formal or informal and whether they are planned or unplanned" (Holton, 1996, p. 233).	Coaching/Mentoring, career planning, training (formal or informal), Empowerment and participation referring to flexibility or freedom to work independently and/or making decisions within function, manuals or information packs provided	Inclusion: Company initiated and supported informal and formal activities to improve employee capability or support development. Exclusion: Employee initiated/requested training
Proposition 4: Employment conditions influence the fulfillment of the psychological contract	Employment Conditions (EC)	"...employees will perceive an organization that treats its employees fairly and with consideration (e.g. good working conditions, merit pay, training and career development opportunities) as an organization that has met its contractual obligations to them under the psychological contract (Winter and Jackson, 2006, p. 424; Eisenberger, Fasolo and Davis-LaMastro, 1990).	Market related compensation/performance based pay, work-life balance (flexible work arrangements), work characterized by ability to focus, resources (e.g. network/equipment, conducive office environment	Exclusion: employee development, excl. work relations with supervisor/team Inclusion: Work environment or employment conditions

## APPENDIX F- UNIVERSITY ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER



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NHREC Registration number: RC-241114-045

<https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/>

16/12/2020

Olivia Bischoff

Email: [g09B0991@campus.ru.ac.za](mailto:g09B0991@campus.ru.ac.za)

Review Reference: 2020-2730-4863

Dear Prof Noel Pearse

**Title:** An analysis of the talent management of recently hired employees from the perspective of the probation period and the psychological contract

Principal Investigator: Prof Noel Pearse

Collaborators: Ms Olivia Bischoff,

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee (RU-HEC). Your Approval number is: 2020-2730-4863

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloging number allocated.

Sincerely,

Prof Arthur Webb

Chair: Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee, RU-HEC

cc: Mr. Siyanda Manqele - Ethics Coordinator